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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1522
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHWH/WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS PRIORITY
RUEHSW/AMEMBASSY BERN PRIORITY 0068
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN PRIORITY 0056
RUEHMC/AMCONSUL MONTERREY PRIORITY 0030
RUMIAAA/USCINCSO MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 0080
RUESDM/JTLO MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HAVANA 000311

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STATE DEPT FOR WHA/CCA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/28/2017

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SUBJECT: WITH NGO BACKING, "LADIES IN WHITE" TO APPEAL TO
HRC

REF: HAVANA 285

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Classified By: COM Michael E. Parmly for Reason 1.4(d).

11. (C) Summary: Cuba's "Ladies in White" will send a note to the UN's Human Rights Council on March 28, calling on the body to demand that the Cuban Government immediately release its prisoners of conscience. The note, translated unofficially in Paragraph 3, is supported by ten of the country's most influential pro-democracy organizations, including Vladimiro Roca's All United, Martha Beatriz Roque's Assembly to Promote Civil Society, Edgard Lopez's Marti Youth Coalition and two independent labor groups. Oswaldo Paya of the Christian Liberation Movement declined to sign the addendum to the note, but reportedly said he would write and sign a separate statement of support for the Ladies' appeal. Juan Carlos Gonzalez Leyva of the Cuban Human Rights Foundation said he would do the same. The Ladies' note will carry powerful moral weight with HRC members. End Summary.

12. (C) The Ladies in White, relatives of the 75 peaceful activists imprisoned in a March 2003 crackdown, shared with USINT on March 27 a note that the group plans to send to the HRC, and all its member nations, on March 28. Unofficial translation follows:

TEXT OF NOTE

13. (SBU) "We, the wives, mothers, daughters and relatives of the 75 prisoners of conscience seized by Cuban authorities in the March 2003 wave of repression, address the prestigious Council and request that, before the end of your session, you demand that the Cuban Government immediately and unconditionally free the prisoners of conscience, who remain unjustly incarcerated. We hope that the Council will make a positive decision in this case and consider all that happened during the fourth anniversary of the Black Spring crackdown, during which we were threatened and attacked, verbally and psychologically, by the political police and government-organized groups dressed as civilians. These acts showed once again the intolerance (of the GOC) and the violation of our rights as Cuban citizens. To give added weight to this petition, we have united in this call with

various civil, labor and political organizations. Please hear the call for LIBERTY made by Cuban families."

SUPPORT FROM TEN KEY GROUPS

14. (C) In an addendum to the petition are the signatures of leaders of ten influential Cuban pro-democracy groups: Vladimiro Roca of All United; Felix Bonne (as well as Rene Gomez Manzano) of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society; Roberto de Miranda of the Independent Teachers College; Edgard Lopez of the Marti Youth Coalition; Carmelo Diaz of the Christian Labor Union; Aurelio Bachiller of labor federation CONIC; Manuel Cuesta Morua of Progressive Arc; Julia Cecilia Delgado of the Liberal Party; Gisela Delgado of the Independent Library Project; and Leon Padron Azcuy of the Cuban Liberal Movement.

PAYA TO SIGN SEPARATE STATEMENT OF SUPPORT

15. (C) Absent from the list of signatures was that of MCL chief Oswaldo Paya, founder of the Varela Project. Leading Ladies Laura Pollan and Bertha Soler told us that on March 28, a day after they visited Paya's house with an invitation to sign the addendum, Paya sent two MCL members to Pollan's house. The two MCL members explained that Paya was in the process of drafting a separate statement of support for the Ladies' note, and that the statement would be signed in Paya's name. (Note: Pollan and Soler also told us that Juan Carlos Gonzalez Leyva, the blind activist who heads the Ciego-de-Avila-based Cuban Human Rights Foundation, agreed early March 28 that he would sign a statement of support for the Ladies' note, and drum up similar support from other pro-democracy groups in Ciego de Avila and Camaguey. End Note.)

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COMMENT

16. (C) Although we would be happier if Paya's name were on the addendum, the Damas' note will carry powerful moral weight with HRC members. Neither the Damas nor any of the other signers are under the illusion that the statement will turn a majority in the HRC, but they feel -- and we concur -- that it is a powerful statement in its own right. It is unclear why Paya committed to creating a statement of support rather than signing the Damas' addendum. However, in February, Paya's MCL publicly urged HRC members to introduce a resolution calling on the GOC to free its political prisoners, and the Ladies in White did not support that project. It could also be that Paya is loath to share signature space with the likes of Vladimiro Roca, who he blames for sabotaging the Varela Project in December 2002, by shifting attention away from it within All United.

17. (C) Comment (continued): It would be a mistake to make Paya's signing/not signing the focus of this extraordinary story, especially if he does issue a statement of support for the Damas' effort. Either way, March has been a magnificent month for Cuba's opposition, given the rising profile of the Ladies in White (reftel), the regime's bungled response to Damas activities between March 17 and 20, and Cuba's flap with Sweden over remarks at the HRC and the alleged opening of the Swedish diplomatic pouch. The Damas' note, and the broad support it has attracted, is an important step in the struggle for democracy in Cuba.

PARMLY